

HURRY TO ETERNAL LIFE

How many people after a Sunday Mass remember the opening prayer of that Mass? Very few indeed if any! Most remember something of the readings, especially if the Sunday homily was integrated with the readings. But the opening prayer? It is said by the celebrant, often a little too quickly to catch the words, unless of course one has a Sunday missal in their hands. All these prayers are quite short but when one looks at them carefully one finds that they contain a wealth of faith and in very few words give a beautiful synopsis of what we are asking of God at this Mass. The vast majority of these prayers (three prayers for each Mass: (an Opening Prayer, an Offertory Prayer and the Prayer after Communion.) are quite ancient and were all originally composed in Latin. One of the beauties of the Latin Language is that one can say so much in just a few words, as opposed to English which overflows with a plethora of words ultimately saying very little. These three prayers are quite short but very pithy in meaning and in the theology and beliefs they contain. The opening prayer for the Mass this weekend is a good example of putting so much in so few words. It reads as follows:

*Father,
You show your almighty power
In your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry toward
the eternal life you promise
and come to share in the joys
of your kingdom.*

This is a beautiful short prayer which acknowledges God's power, his forgiveness and gifts of love and our final destination in his kingdom. However, there is one rather cryptic line in the prayer in which we pray for God's help to hurry toward the eternal life He promises. Just what does this mean? We all want to share in the joys of Heaven, but we all also want to wait a bit longer. The prayer is certainly not one asking for a shorter life. That goes against basic human instincts which tend to make one live as long as possible. We know this world; what awaits us is totally unknown, even if it may sound wonderful, but entrance to this life is only through death. Death is something most humans basically fear. So just exactly what were we all praying for while the priest led us in this prayer and we all answered, AMEN?

The word "hurry" does imply some notion of speed, but in normal conversation, humans very often use the word to spur someone to get started on some project or some task. For instance when one's child has some school project to do and they are putting it off to some indefinite time, a parent knowing that things left to the last minute never quite turn out right will begin to urge their child to get started now. And often this admonition is accompanied to "hurry" and get started. One cannot put it off indefinitely. In an analogous way we prayed to God to help us get started, to "hurry," so to speak, to become aware of how we are living our faith now rather than at the last minute trying to get our spiritual life together. Faith is not something static but rather dynamic. It is more than just a profession of what we believe; it is and must be the way we live it. How would

we answer the question, "How does your faith affect the way you live?" A simple question, but one with profound implications as to just where one stands in their relationship to their God. A child growing up in a good Catholic family in which Sunday Mass was attended, grace was said before meals, and the family prayed together at times has a great beginning.

But then come the teen years with all the stresses and yearnings to be one's self, to be really free (whatever that may mean to any particular teenager.) And then once they go off to college or perhaps to some profession for their life's work, that yearning for complete freedom hangs on until one reaches age twenty. At that point scientists have now proved that the judgment center in the brain kicks into action. It is then that the young man or woman sees life and reality from an entirely different aspect. All the values that the parents have taught them suddenly have real value in their lives and it is then that they validate and accept their parents' faith and wisdom. There will always be some who will not accept anything no matter what and are willing to go it entirely alone. It is then in God's hands and many a parent has spent long hours in prayer for their kids.

But then as adult life begins to become a reality and professions are chosen, life styles are accepted, responsibilities are given them and they begin to settle into the real world but important choices still have to be faced: Is God important? Is one's faith important? Is the upcoming marriage going to work out? And of course, the work one has chosen; is it right for them? Putting all this together one then can get some idea of just what one was praying for in that opening prayer. All too often it will take some crisis to bring one into a sense of the importance of one's faith in their lives. This may very well involve making some serious decisions as to whether God is really someone in one's life. Don't expect a sudden change to come immediately. God has his own schedule and very often gets the attention of a person through ordinary things of life, sometimes including very serious tragedies. God knows every single person completely and knows what they feel like and what they need really deep down. He then uses the normal warp and woof of life to help bring many to their senses and through crooked ways and byways, lead them to finally come to meet him and come to know him. Almost always such an encounter with the unseen God will be so personal and so intimate that the person involved will be quite incapable of explaining it to anyone, even those most close to them. But it will begin to shine forth in the way they live, the way they talk, in their whole outlook on life in general.

It is the teaching and faith of the Church that God does not want to lose a single human being. This belief can be very consoling but it can also be quite a mystery. There are some very nasty and evil people out there, people totally against God in every conceivable way. Yet God still loves them as only a God can, with infinite and total love. But rather than worry about them, everyone must take stock of just where they stand now, not yesterday or way in the past. It is almost always impossible to make up for the past, but with God at one's side, the present can be most enjoyable, loving and most worthwhile

Why wait for the end to be near? Rather let God back into your life today. Don't fear, you won't become a religious freak or nut, someone that everyone will shy away from. That is not God's style. Hurry and begin the journey, the process. Discover how important you are in God's eyes.

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